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WORLD

Soviet rumor has Samantha Smith killed by CIA

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MOSCOW — An apparently organized whisper campaign is spreading the rumor here that Samantha Smith, the 13-year-old Maine school girl who promoted goodwill toward the Soviet Union, was killed by the CIA.

As if to reinforce those rumors, an allegedly KGB-run weekly said this week that American television personality Jessica Savitch "was done in" because one of her programs angered "those who specialize in anti-Sovietism."

Ms. Savitch, a PBS reporter, died in October 1983, when a car carrying her and a friend plunged into the Delaware Canal.

The Savitch article appeared in the *New Times* magazine yesterday and most diplomats had not seen it, when asked for comment.

But one American diplomat said the "article certainly does not sound credible."

At the same time, the diplomat added that the article seemed to reflect the harsher propaganda tone toward the United States that he said has become evident in the Soviet media in recent days.

Rumors that the Smith girl was killed by the CIA began almost as soon as the official Tass news agency reported her death in a plane crash Aug. 26.

The original Tass report may have encouraged speculation about a conspiracy because it said that the plane carrying Samantha and her father "had been diverted for an unspecified reason."

That reason was bad weather, but Tass never mentioned it.

Although no direct allegations of foul play have appeared in the Soviet media, people from ordinary citizens to intellectuals seem to believe that Samantha was silenced so that she could not continue her efforts to build goodwill toward the Soviet Union.

As a result of her much-publicized 1983 visit to this country at the invitation of then President Yuri V. Andropov, Samantha was probably the best-known American here.

Jessica Savitch was not known here at all.

But a three-page article in this week's *New Times* is very specific in charging two controversial public figures constantly attacked in the Soviet media with masterminding her death.

Those two are named as Vladimir Bukovsky, a well-known and vocal Soviet emigre, and Rabbi Meier Kahane, of the Jewish Defense League.

"Both leaders are CIA agents, united by their common fanatical hatred of the Soviet Union," the weekly said.

"The Zionist wreak brutal revenge on those who disclose the truth about their victims," added the weekly, which appears in nine languages and has a total press run of 500,000 copies.

A recent book, "The New KGB," by two former American intelligence officers, William R. Corson and Robert T. Crowley, identifies the weekly as "KGB-run." Several of the magazine's correspondents have in the past been revealed to be KGB operatives.

New Times bases its allegation solely on a purported tape recording from "a former Soviet citizen" wanting to return to his homeland from West Berlin.

According to *New Times*, a program Ms. Savitch did in June 1983, on disillusioned Soviet emigres, many of them Jewish, caused a storm.

Protests were allegedly held and "newspapers printed articles intimating that Moscow was responsible and that Jessica Savitch was a 'soviet agent.'"

New Times said that after the programs' critics abandoned a contemplated lawsuit, "a characteristically American decision was taken — to kill Jessica Savitch to teach others a lesson."

On a weekend trip, "Jessica Savitch was shadowed by gangsters, they were out waiting for her on the road along the Delaware Canal," the magazine said. A truck then allegedly swerved into the Savitch car at a high speed, forcing it off the road and into the water.

When the victim's car was recovered, the dents made by the truck were covered with deeper dents, said *New Times*. "That's how they got

even with Jessica Savitch."

The larger theme of the article is that Soviet emigres are unhappy after leaving their homeland and when they want to return, often become victims of "Zionist" revenge.

(A Delaware coroner's report found that Ms. Savitch and her companion in the car, *New York Post* executive Martin Fischbein, drowned within minutes after their car plunged into the canal during a heavy rainstorm. The report did not mention a second vehicle being involved in the accident.)

"When I lived in Brooklyn, N.Y., PBS reporters asked me to tell them about myself and the life of former Soviet citizens and what they thought of America," the magazine quotes its Savitch informant as saying.

"I told them the whole truth. After that I was nearly killed and had to go into hiding," the man was quoted as saying.

Another part of the article quotes one Jewish former Soviet citizen as writing that her 16-year-old son "had been murdered by Zionists in trying to leave Israel."

Yet another section of the article declares: "Many acts of violence against former Soviet citizens who try to tell the world the truth about the Zionist deception have come to light."

The Soviet media has stepped up anti-Zionist attacks recently. Observers said that taken together, the *New Times* article amounted to one of the vilest collection of allegations published in a major magazine in years.